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GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHY

FIFTH ANNUAL ADDRESS BEFORE THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, FEBRUARY 16, 1895

By LAURENCE FOSSLER, M.A.

LINCOLN
PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION
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[WELTANSCHAUUNG]

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Perhaps I could not direct your attention to a more interesting, and, in a certain sense, a more important theme than the one in hand; for our age is in many respects a realization of Goethe's prophetic vision. The twentieth century will enter upon its course with an host trained by and imbued with a spirit which largely owes its origin, or, at least, its chief promulgation, to the poet-philosopher. I do not say that Goethe was the *sine qua non* of the intellectual light of our time, or that science would not have made giant strides without him, or that the chaotic "Storm and Stress" diction of his contemporaries in literature would have persisted, or that the dignity and worth of man would not be recognized more now than in his generation, but I do say that in all these movements for the better Goethe has been a banner-bearer, his voice a bugle call rallying men to renewed efforts; that he has, in fact, been a leader and inspirer of men.

Sixty years ago that voice was hushed, but those sixty years have been years of progress and growth in well-nigh all directions. But, strange to say, we, for the first time, seem to have grasped its full meaning and import and spirit, as if former generations had not and could not have felt and understood it; as if the voice had been intended for the ear of the twentieth rather than that of the eighteenth century.

It would lead us too far were we to trace the sources and factors that ministered to Goethe's intellectual life and growth, a life and a growth exuberant with healthy joy and appreciation, whether in art, or science, or literature, or philosophy. The human soul, no matter how strong and vigorous it be in and of itself, is directed and fashioned by external influences no less than by its innate forces. So, in this instance, Goethe, speaking with profound gratitude, frequently pays tribute to Shakespeare, to Homer, to Spinoza. These choice spirits were his guiding stars; they taught him the way to nature and freedom, to high art and high thinking.

And yet, of course, these names are only the choicest representatives of the influences which moulded Goethe. His hereditary tendencies, his training at home and at school, his religious environment, the tradition of the past, his own day and generation acted and reacted upon him and helped to make him what he was. From these latter influences no one can escape. They are beyond human control and management. Involuntarily each individual reflects his age; and all that can be claimed for any man, whether Caesar, or Dante, or Goethe, is, that he has constructed a type within himself of that which necessarily surrounded him; that he shaped and fashioned the given material in conformity with his individuality.

Though Goethe is the prince of German poets, we shall look upon him on this occasion as the philosopher, the teacher. In *Werther*, in *Wilhelm Meister*, in *Faust* he deals with human life in a broad and comprehensive way. His aim, in these works, is to examine into the generic, the typical, the generalized, the representative. He eschews the special or accidental. He wishes to present a large view of life; he dignifies man's nature, even while

laying bare its defects and short-comings. He desires to see and to tell just what he sees. He is not a preacher, not an exhorter. But he says: This is what I see; look at it, examine it, meditate on it, test it, accept it if you will, reject it if you will, but this is the impression that this universe of ours makes upon me. There is borne in upon Goethe through every sense, through every avenue of access to his inner self, a message from this universe, which he must interpret and give forth, a message from nature to man, from man to man, and from man to himself, a message which to-day has been taken up and reiterated by naturalist, by poet, by philosopher.

As already intimated, his speculations and his labors extended not only in the direction of the realms of motives and conduct, of literature and art, but into nature, into science, into botany, biology, osteology, archæology, into finance and administration. There was scarcely a field of inquiry or activity that did not attract him. "Amid littleness and detail he detected the Genius of life, the old cunning Proteus, nestling close beside us." Hence his largeness of vision, hence his marvellous resources, hence, in fact, his philosophy.

Let us, then, ask ourselves: How did Goethe attempt to solve the mysteries of Nature and God? how the Problem of Evil in the universe? how did he estimate the Worth and Work of Life?

In the first part of *Faust*, in the scene "Forest and Cavern" we find the struggling Faust, having fled into the wilds to escape from the demons that were planted in his flesh. He had sought to flee from himself and to commune with nature and throw himself at her bosom. In the exaltation and extasy of his vision, the vision for which he had longed and striven and which was granted him in this holy, retired calm, he bursts out:

"Spirit Sublime, thou gav'st me, gav'st me all
 For which I prayed. Not unto me in vain
 Hast thou thy countenance revealed in fire.
 Thou gav'st me Nature as a kingdom grand
 With power to feel and to enjoy it. Thou
 Not only cold, amazed acquaintance yield'st,
 But grantest that in her profoundest breast
 I gaze, as in the bosom of a friend.
 The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead
 Before me, teaching me to know *my brothers*
In air and water and the silent wood."¹

This poetic outburst is really an enunciation of Goethe's scientific creed. An examination into his conception of Nature and her workings reveal him to be the great champion of her unity, of identity in variation. The discovery of any fact or facts, the explanation of any phenomena meant, as he says himself, "the synthesis of world and mind, giving the most blessed assurance of the eternal harmony of things." As early as 1786 he had discovered and announced the existence of the inter-maxillary bone (the bone bearing the upper incisor teeth), a bone which the anatomists and osteologists of his day had not found nor recognized, and the absence or lack of which seemed to attest an essential difference in the anatomical structure of man and the lower animals. But Goethe's intuitive craving for unity would not admit breaks or cataclysms in nature's domain. Accordingly this discovery but strengthened him in his position and led him to formulate his views to the effect that all differences in the anatomical structure of vertebrates were to be considered as variations of corresponding parts; *i. e.*, the wing of bird, the fin of fish, the arm of man, and foot of horse were really one and the same organ, changed through function and environment. This theory was first announced in

¹Taylor's translation.

1795.¹ We can scarcely appreciate the full significance and importance of these statements, till we remember that his contemporary, Herder, in the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, rather held that man had descended from animal and animals from plants.

But the vantage ground thus gained only opened larger vistas. If it were demonstrably true that the anatomical structure of vertebrates was founded on the principles of homology, Goethe felt justified in advancing another step, and in holding that there existed a "similar analogy between the various parts of one and the same organic being." Careful observation of the transformation of insects from the larva into its final stage suggested that the originally similar rings—the first and the last only showing any deviation—gradually transform themselves and develop appendages: those forming the thorax, legs; those of the head, mandibles and antennae; and that, consequently, the abdominal rings conformed to the original undifferentiated type. Especially did the vegetable world engage Goethe's scientific interest. He, there, perceived clearly the transition from fundamentally similar into functionally dissimilar organs.

He divined that leaf and flower and fruit were in reality the same organ, changed to suit circumstances and conditions, or, rather, changed by circumstances and conditions. Once possessed of these facts, he was led to recognize the skull to be composed of transformed vertebrae. He says: "The three posterior bones (of the head) I recognized easily enough, but only in the year 1790, when I picked up a fractured sheep skull in the

¹ *Erster Entwurf einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie, etc.*

Jewish cemetery at Venice, it flashed upon me that the facial bones, too, were transformed vertebrae. Then I saw the transition from the sphenoid into the ethmoid and the turbinated bones."

You perceive that his outlook into the harmony and essential unity of organic creation became more and more penetrating. Let us guard ourselves lest we regard these truisms of the end of the nineteenth century as being too self evident or of slight moment. *These discoveries betokened a new spirit, a new point of view, a new conception of nature.* They betokened the entering into the splendid domain of modern science, in which man is to make lasting conquests, in which he will constrain her to minister to his highest intellectual faculties, as well as to be his hand-maid and household drudge. These views of Goethe are so fundamental that they may well be regarded as the working theory of the nineteenth century scientists. His views on evolution and development are manifestly closely akin to those so brilliantly worked out by Darwin. Darwin's work, the *Origin of Species*, was given to the world in 1859, some thirty years after Goethe's death. Only laboriously collected data could prove the correctness of so widespreading and widesweeping a generalization which Goethe had formulated only intuitively, I admit, and it is Darwin's chief title to our esteem, as Prof. Helmholtz remarks, "to have pointed out the relation of causes, the effects of which are, or at least might be, the bringing about of such correspondences and homologous organs in the most widely separated organisms."

In the light of what has been said so far we shall have no great difficulty in appreciating Goethe's conception of Nature as reflected in the following extracts from his aphorisms on Nature:

"Nature! We are surrounded by her and locked in her clasp; powerless to leave her and powerless to come closer to her."

"She creates new forms without end; what exists now, never was before; what was, comes not again; all is new and yet always old."

"Nature is the sole artist; out of the simplest materials (she produces) the greatest diversity, attaining, with no trace of effort, the finest perfection, the closest precision, always softly veiled. Each of her works has an essence of its own; every shape that she takes is in idea utterly isolated; and yet all forms one."

"There is constant life in her motion and development; and yet she remains where she was. She is eternally changing, nor for a moment does she stand still. Of rest she knows nothing, and to all stagnation she has affixed her curse. She is steadfast; her steps are measured, her exceptions rare, her laws immutable."

"Her springs of action are few, but they never wear out. They are always working, always manifold."

"She puts gulfs between all things, and all things strive to be interfused. She isolates everything, that she may draw everything together."

"Every moment she starts on the longest journeys, and every moment reaches her goal."

"She is whole and yet never finished. As she works now, so can she work forever."

"Life is her fairest invention, and Death is her device for having life in abundance."

"She hides herself in a thousand names and terms, and is always the same."

"She envelops man in darkness, and urges him constantly to the light. She makes him depend on the earth, heavy and sluggish, and always rouses him up afresh."¹

To Goethe Nature was the living garment of the Deity, "*der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid*" woven "*in Lebensfluten, im Thatensturm*" (in the tides of life, in action's storm). Nature ever varying, yet ever the same, ever new, yet ever old; Nature in her completeness, her adaptation to the wants of her children, her passivity, her unconquerable energies, her vastness, her inapproachableness, her willingness to disclose her secrets when rightly

¹Maxims and Reflections of Goethe, translated by T. Bailey Saunders.

interrogated, Goethe regarded as the visible manifestation of God. In the *Gespräche mit Goethe* Eckermann tells how, one day, some one presented him with some young nestlings. The parent bird, too, had been caught; but, though liberty was given to her, she did not avail herself of it, preferring to brave danger and captivity to leaving her offspring. Upon expressing his astonishment at such parental solicitude, Goethe chided him: "Foolish man," said he, "if you believe in God, you would not marvel. If God did not animate the bird with this all-powerful impulse for her young, and if this same principle did not extend throughout all nature, the world could not stand! But now this Divine energy is everywhere, this Love Eternal is everywhere active."¹ Goethe is pantheistic. He finds nature to possess neither speech nor language, yet creating "hearts and tongues through which she feels and speaks." He finds Thought, Kindness, Love there. The universe to him, as to Spinoza, when viewed in the light of *extension*, is matter, when viewed as *thought* or *intelligence*, is the *causa sui*, is God. The universe is not God, yet God and the universe are one. Dr. Hedge defines pantheism as being "God, the creative and ruling power of the universe, distinguished by reason alone from the universe itself." Goethe's speculative and religious notions accord entirely with this definition. He is a disciple of Spinoza, a thorough-going defender of the inseparableness of Nature and God. He asks:

¹Vol. II., p. 234. For other passages, dealing with this same subject, see *Gespräche*, Vol. II., pp. 190-192, 199-200. Vol. III., pp. 22, 30, 150, 257-258, *et al.*

“What God were he who only from without
 Impelled, controlled the circles of his worlds?
 Nay, rather does he move them from within;
 Brooding o'er Nature, Nature housing him,
 He evermore his Spirit-power proves
 In that which in him is and lives and moves.”¹

Goethe was the last to remove from atheism, but he protested against anthropomorphism in all its forms. The tendency to development, the correlation of forces in all the countless metamorphoses of tangible, material things, spoke to him of an inscrutable power transcending all human conception and refusing to be comprised in any scholastic definition, or creed of church. “*Credo Deum*,” he says, “that is a fine, a worthy thing to say; but to recognize God wherever and whenever he reveals himself is the only true joy on earth.” Again he says: “The finest achievement for a man of thought is to have fathomed what may be fathomed and quietly revere the unfathomable.”

I scarcely need to point out the correspondence between these views of Goethe and the philosophy based on the ultimate results of modern science. The conception of an extraneous anthropomorphic, spasmodically acting agent or master-mechanic sitting outside his universe, ruling and directing it arbitrarily and without certain sequence, has been relegated to the limbo of past crudities. Creative power cannot be conceived of in so inadequate and puerile a way. Nor, on the other hand, can it be conceived of as hurling its worlds into space, leaving them to blind, dreary, lawless chance. The latter view is

¹ Was wär' ein Gott, der nur von aussen stiesse,
 Im Kreis das All am Finger laufen liesse,
 Ihm ziemt's die Welt im Innern zu hewegen,
 Natur in Sich, Sich in Natur zu hegen,
 So dass, was in Ihm lebt und webt und ist,
 Nie Seine Kraft, nie Seinen Geist vermisst.

— *Gott und Welt.*

as irrational as the former. In the light of modern science, the special or chance agency theory is simply impossible, neither can we pretend that the natural law theory can give answer to ultimate questions. Some wider and more fundamental generalization can alone reconcile the existence of laws, eternal, unvarying, inexorable, and "a true objective reasonableness" (the phrase is John Fiske's) in the universe. He says: "There is a true objective reasonableness in the universe; its events have an orderly progression."¹ And again: "The process of evolution is itself the working out of a mighty Teleology."²

What, now, is the only way to reconcile these seemingly opposite and mutually exclusive views of special or "direct" agency and "natural law?" Modern science, or rather modern philosophy based on that science, re-asserts and amplifies and develops the views of an Origen, a Clement, an Athanasius and other profound thinkers from their time to the present, and holds to a God imminent, indwelling, and inseparably in Nature. In the words of Professor Le Conte: "We are compelled to acknowledge an infinite, imminent Deity behind phenomena, but manifested to us on the outside as an all-pervasive energy."³ And John Fiske: "In the swaying to and fro of molecules and the ceaseless pulsations of ether, in the secular shifting of planetary orbits, in the busy work of frost and rain-drop, in the mysterious sprouting of the seed, in the everlasting pale of death and life renewed, in the dawning of the babe's intelligence, in the varied deeds of men from age to age, (the thinker) finds that which awakens the soul to reverential awe; and each act of scientific explana-

¹ Idea of God, p. xi.

² Cosmic Philosophy, Vol. 2, p. 406.

³ Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought.

tion but reveals an opening through which shines the glory of the Eternal Majesty." ¹

Le Conte compares this relation of an imminent Deity and Nature to the relation between mind and brain.

It is conceivable, he says in substance, that an observer, an *outside* observer, could detect and distinguish molecular and chemical changes accompanying or conditioning psychic activity; but it is inconceivable how such an observer could detect the psychic activity itself. That could, of course, only be known through consciousness, *i. e.*, the psychic state could only be known by the inner personality. Now science simply clammers round on the outside; it is bound to observe and formulate its observations into wider and wider generalizations, but they can only be made from the outside, and consequently, they cannot militate against a conscious personality within.

Thus it will be seen that Goethe was a fit precursor of nineteenth century philosophy. That philosophy affirms and confirms the existence of a Power—unknown and unknowable it is termed by some—a Power which underlies all phenomena as their very source and center and circumference, a Power or a God in whom, to use St. Paul's phrase, "We live and move and have our being."

But now let us examine another, and, if possible, a still more profound conception of Goethe's—his ideas of Evil in the universe. We shall find Mephistopheles the sign and symbol, the very embodiment of "Evil." Whatever traits Goethe bestowed upon that most celebrated creation that do not agree with this view, must be regarded as incidental ornamentation required by poetic necessities. In the Faust story, in that story of man's limitation, bewilderment and error, in that story of a soul's discontent and despair because of the seeming narrowness and petti-

¹ Idea of God, p. 110.

ness of life and its opportunities, in that story in which is heard the clanking of the chains of bondage as they are shaken into the very face of the Almighty, Mephistopheles appears and offers to be a savior, a companion, and a guide through the world and to the heart's desires. As in the days of Job, the Adversary had asked and obtained permission to "try the servant," who, according to his view, served the Lord "after strange devices." He proposed to make Faust "eat dust and with a zest, as did a certain snake, his near relation." He had come to Faust by sufferance of the Lord, who had declared:

"Man's active nature, flagging, seeks too soon the level;
Unqualified repose he learns to crave.
Whence, *willingly*, the comrade him I gave.
Who works, excites, and must create as Devil.

Goethe makes Mephistopheles appear in numberless disguises; he is a perfect Proteus in form. There is stamped on him, however, an essential unity, an identity of aim and purpose. As above stated, he is the embodiment of the opposition to all order. Nay, more—he is "Evil" in the universe, he is negation, opposition, disintegration, destruction, Death—both in the psychic and the physical realm; in the world of matter and of mind.

In answer to Faust's importunities, the exorcised Mephistopheles defines himself thus:

"I am the Spirit that Denies!"

and then he justifies himself at once by adding,

"And justly so: for all things, from the Void
Called forth, *deserve* to be destroyed:
'T were better, then, were naught created."

Again:

"All which you as Sin have rated—
Destruction,—aught with evil blent,—
That is my proper element."

Yet this activity, this personification of denial, opposition, and destruction of that which the fiat of creative energy has brought forth presents nothing startling. The Hebrew Satan, the Persian Ahriman, the Hindoo Vritra, the Norse Loki stand for the same conception. All nations have personified the powers of good and the powers of evil, and men have regarded the universe as being divided between these two. So I say, that there is nothing startling in this conception of Goethe's in having Mephistopheles stand as the embodiment of evil. It is rather these lines that startle us:—

“Part of the Part (*i. e.*, merely one aspect, one form) am I, once
All, in primal Night—
Part of the Darkness which brought forth the Light.”

and the lines,

“Part of the Power (I am) not understood,
Which always *wills* the *Bad* and always *works* the *Good*.”

It is rather these lines that contain the challenging proposition. Goethe, then, conceives of the Power, generally denominated evil, rated as evil, as a part of a whole, as a part of the power and energy, and essentially one with the power and energy in the universe; as a remnant, so to speak, a representative of a former condition; or, if that is too anthropomorphic a conception, as one aspect of the stupendous, all-pervading World-Power. For to him there exists only “*Das Ewig Eine, das sich vielfach offenbart*” —the Eternally One, manifesting itself in most diverse ways. Goethe cannot conceive of nature, the whole boundless domain of the universe, of every object and force, whether physical or psychic, whether matter or spirit, in any other way than that they are all parts or portions of an infinite Unit. Hence, Mephistopheles, though the embodiment of *evil*, though *Evil* itself, accomplishes the *Good*. And how? By destroying the partial and the

incomplete. The evil consists in the fact that a transition from a lower to a higher form of life or existence, or, as we ordinarily say, an evolutionary process, is impossible without the destruction of any given state of being. Growth of organized bodies proceeds simultaneously with their destruction. Or, at any rate, the "neutral zone" is exceedingly narrow. The wave of life is evermore followed by the wave of death. There is an eternal formation and transformation, and eternal dissolution and recombining into new forms. The Divine creative Energy must be accompanied by the Divine destructive Energy. "Every moment," he says of nature, "every moment she starts on the longest journeys, and every moment reaches her goal." Existence means transition; Life means Death. Hear Mephistopheles:

"The Something of this clumsy World—has yet,
 With all that I have undertaken,
 Not been by me disturbed or shaken:
 From earthquake, tempest, wave, volcano's brand,
 Back into quiet settle sea and land.
 And that damned stuff, the bestial human brood—
 What use in having that to play with?
 How many have I done away with!
 And ever circulates a newer, fresher blood.
 * * * * *
 From water, earth, and air unfolding,
 A thousand germs break forth and grow."

Confessedly his opposition, his uprooting, his destroying are unavailing in the direction aimed at by him. Rather does his work avail in making more abundant life possible, in bringing about the fullness of life, through progress and growth. He, therefore, *wills* the *Bad*, but *does* the *Good*; therefore, he is a part of the Creative Energy, a part of the necessary order of the world.

We all are ready to acknowledge the necessity of such an eternal conflict in the physical universe, but Goethe

entertained a like conviction touching the realm of mind and morals. Precisely as he held that all forms of life now extant, are the resultants of contending agencies, agencies for and against, active throughout the whole process of creation, so he regarded our moral and spiritual ideals and advancement as the resultant of tendencies no less diverse or opposite, each contending for the mastery. To Goethe the very conception of morality involved struggle, failure, triumph. In other words, morality involves the existence of the Mephistophelian element within us, as an indispensable part of our natures. This Mephistophelian element, conceived of as a part of ourselves, is the necessary condition upon which all possibility of spiritual excellence depends.

It is just here where the average moralist hesitates to follow. Goethe's quasi-pantheistic or theistic-pantheistic views are sometimes adjudged to be unmoral if not immoral. He is made to hold that God is the author of evil and sin. If there is but one force in the universe, in which there is so much evil and sin, and if God is that force, how, then, can we escape the conclusion that God is the author of evil? We cannot, except as we realize that evil, sin, imperfection are mere abstract terms (I beg you to understand me), expressing a comparison between various states of existence, each perfect in and of itself; *i. e.*, when dissociated from every other mode of existence. As Professor Falkenberg, in his summary of the philosophy of Spinoza, has pointed out, that thinker held that "In reality everything is that which it can be, hence without defect; everything is, in itself considered, perfect; even the fool and the sinner cannot be otherwise than they are; they appear imperfect only when placed beside the wise and the virtuous. Sin is thus only a lesser reality than virtue, evil a lesser good; good and

bad, activity and passivity, power and weakness are merely distinctions in degree."¹

I make this quotation touching Spinoza's philosophy to point out the source of, or, at least, the corroborating authority in Goethe's philosophy. Goethe acknowledged himself the debtor of Spinoza. They held, in common, that "particular cases of defect are justified by the perfection of the whole;" that the Universe is perfect to an Infinite intelligence, and that only our finite, diminutive mental grasp fails to reach the higher unity.

Then, to sum up Goethe's position on what human speech designates as death, destruction, and dissolution in the physical universe, as sin and evil in the spiritual, it is evident, that he considered them the necessary conditions or stages in a process of evolution and growth. The ideal to which all life is tending he conceived to be hidden from man's eyes. Yet he was conscious of a polarity or tendency upwards. The

". . . one far-off, divine event
To which the whole creation moves,"

was a reality to him. His keenest observation, his strong intuition led him, nay, forced him, to acknowledge and revere "the Power, not ourselves," which in the physical domain of nature builds and destroys, builds and destroys and yet advances; and, in the moral world, succeeds and fails, succeeds and fails, succeeds and fails, and yet, humanly speaking, "makes for righteousness."

But now, finally, let us ask: What means or agencies are at the disposal of this Power to lead men to a higher estate? What then, according to Goethe, are the chief factors in the moulding and enlarging and fashioning the

¹History of Modern Philosophy, p. 140.

inner life of man? How does man fit into the universe? What shall be the standard of his success? In other words: What is the purpose of man's existence, and what means are at his command to attain this purpose?

Goethe's philosophical views respecting the unity and the perfection of nature and of the moral forces in the universe did not lead him to entertain a *laissez faire* creed or practice.

His constant watchword is "endeavor, activity, toil, effort." It is no easy thing to shake off the clogs of earth. You remember in Wilhelm Meister's *Lehrbrief* or *Indenture* this passage:

"Art is long, life short, judgment difficult, opportunity transient. To act is easy, to think, hard, to act according to our thoughts, troublesome. . . . The excellent is rarely found, more rarely valued. The heights charm us; the steps to it do not; with the summit in our view we love to walk along the plain."¹

How, then, is man to train himself to value the truly excellent and not to shun the weariness of the steps to attain the height? Goethe's answer is: through *Culture* and *Experience*; *i. e.*, through the assimilation of the best that civilization has produced in art, in science, in literature, and through the direct contact of the ego with its environment. Goethe realized, as few men of his day realized, that he was the heir of Time, of the visible and tangible products of the past, as well as of invisible and intangible bequests.

"My inheritance," he says, "how glorious and how fair,
Time is my seed-field, of Time I am heir."

He held that, of necessity, each human soul must make the life contemporary and preceding it the medium in which to unfold its powers, till, helped by infinite Love, the "stubborn laurel" is twined about the victor's brow.

¹ *Wilhelm Meister*, Bk. VII., Chap. IX.

I put the sentence advisedly thus, for, whatever may be said to the contrary, Goethe's nature was essentially religious, bidding him to explore and penetrate whatever he could, bidding him, too, to revere the unknown. This element of reverence, the religious element, betrays itself constantly in all his writings. It betrays itself in his real, or, more frequently, apparent, worldliness, in his nature cult, in all his philosophy. True, he himself recognizes and presses for recognition cultural influences the importance and value of which are not appreciated by a lower order of minds; influences which, Goethe discerns, enter deeply into man's spiritual growth. He discerns in man a restlessness, a dissatisfied longing after what-not; he interprets this as an essential condition to "pass from more to more," "from the blade to the ear, afterwards to the full corn in the ear." A Faust can safely pledge his soul to Satan on the condition that it shall be forfeited only when sense pleasures shall forever content it. That moment never comes. Man's place in nature is not to succumb to earth and earthly things, not to rot with the beasts, but to be up and doing. Despite deviations, man has "an instinct of the one true way." In the transcendent mysteries of the spiritual world, Faith and Truth and Love are immense realities to Goethe. His watch-words are *learn, do, ACT*.

"When the crowd sways, unbelieving,
Show the daring will that warms,
He is crowned with all achieving
Who perceives, and then performs."¹

Perception and action, learning and doing, are the cries from the mouth of this prophet. *Ohne Hast, aber ohne Rast*; like the very stars in their orbits, obeying the Almighty's commands, man must go, must fit himself for action and then act.

¹ *Faust*, Part II., Act I.

I said above that Goethe was the apostle of culture. Yes, but he also wrapt a halo of dignity and worth about the common, the homespun realities. These he exalted; these he idealized. He saw, as he said to Eckermann in referring to Wilhelm Meister, that, when man submits to the instructions, which trivial, commonplace things can afford, he is "like Saul, the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses and found a kingdom." The dross can be turned into gold; that is precisely the value of the experiences of life. Those virtues which only the highest stations can elicit and foster cannot be regarded as fundamental to a common humanity. Scherer finds that "In *Tasso*, self-denial, moderation, and renunciation appear as the chief requirements for a wise conduct of life." This is the ideal set forth not only in *Tasso*, but in *Wilhelm Meister* and in *Faust*. Ultimately the poet would have us pass from self-glorification to self-renunciation. Life is not all the one, is not all the other. The voice of the ancient goddess of wisdom, Pallas, bids men to practice

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control."

But Goethe, while accepting this injunction, would go further:

". who seeks not noble works
Belongs but to the elements."¹

Man's worth and value to the world are naught, if he stops with self. The virtues, insisted on by Pallas, lead men "to sovereign power," to act and work in their day and generation. But he who dallies and plays with life is lost. The dreamer, the emotionalist, is lost. Werther, that hyper-sensitive Hamlet, whose every nerve thrilled and throbbed with generous impulses, was lost. 'Tis not enough to feel, not enough to meditate; we must act

¹*Faust*, Part II., V.

Goethe crowned the Second Part of *Faust* with a presentation of benevolent, altruistic activity. He makes Faust realize the truth that

"Men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

He depicted Faust as being beaten back, *driven* to seek shelter in this sphere, after having been whipped and scourged by all sorts of phantoms and spectres, after having realized the futility of making aught else commensurate with the responsibility and the purposes of living. Pardon my explicitness. The views indicated seem to me to be the ripest conclusions of the octogenarian poet; they are the legacy which the poet-sage, the philosopher-scientist has left us. Of course you have observed the identity of these results with the Master's "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If this be all, you may ask, then why this meandering, why this insistence upon culture and liberty and individuality? Hear Goethe himself:

"Those do not do well who, in a solitary, and exclusive manner, follow moral cultivation by itself. On the contrary, it will be found that he, whose spirit strives for a development of that kind, has likewise every reason, at the same time, to improve the finer sentient powers, that he may not run the risk of sinking from his moral height, by giving way to a lawless fancy and degrading his moral nature, by allowing it to take delight in tasteless baubles, if not in something worse."¹

Again he says:

"The whole universe lies before us, like a quarry before the master builder, who only deserves this name if he, out of these fortuitous stone-masses, build a structure corresponding to his ideal, and, if he do his work with economy, skill, and purpose. Everything without us is element, material, indeed, I may say everything about us is such, but deep within lies the creative power, capable of shaping all that is to be, giving us neither rest nor quiet, till we have, in some way, disposed of and given form and shape to the elements around us."¹

¹ *Wilhelm Meister, Bekenntnisse einer schoenen Seele.*

This being Goethe's view of man and his environments, we can understand his insistence on culture, on all that assures breadth and scope and growth. This explains to us his reversion to Hellenism, to those rare ideals of beauty and form of the ancient world. Modern industrialism did not content him, conventional Christianity, with its penchant for self-abasement and dogmatism, did not content him. Along with all that the modern world has, he would enter into the past, make antiquity subserve the present, by teaching that present

“Grace, Majesty and the calm Bliss of life.”

He understood the influence the matchless ideals of the “old pagan world of beauty” had on man's development. True, they were only artistic, intellectual types, not necessarily moral. But morality is not the whole of this world; growth along other lines is equally demanded by man's nature. The fine arts are not necessarily moral pursuits, nevertheless, only man with an infinite capacity for advancement can cultivate them. They are expressions of the higher life within him. The centuries since the Italian Renaissance justify Goethe's position. The asceticism of the middle ages had to be supplemented, or rather, supplanted by juster views of man and his place in the universe. Man had been enveloped by the choke-damp of tradition and gloomy dogma, the Renaissance let in light, and beauty and renewed vigor. There was, accordingly, a blending of greater moral earnestness and greater human freedom, a more adequate recognition of man as a brother and an exaltation of self. Existence was placed in a new perspective. Henceforth neither Epicureans nor flagellants presented ideals to the world. A new era, an era of toil and discovery and progress had dawned.

In the Second Part of *Faust* the Aged Toiler is represented by Goethe as having seen the white wand of the

spectre, Death. For a moment he was terrified. He had not yet earned his liberty, he had not yet freed himself entirely from the thralls. Could he but stand a free, untrammelled, manly man, up-borne, by nature, resigned as a flower or a bird! But these brain spectres! These phantom shapes! Blindness is breathed upon him; his eyesight darkens; but, lo! The splendor of an inward vision shines!

“The night seems deeper now to press around me,”
he breaks out,

“But in my inmost spirit all is light.
I rest not till the finished work has crowned me.”

Active! Active!! Active!!!

“Yes, to this thought I hold with firm persistence;
The last results of wisdom stamps it true:—
*He only earns his freedom and existence
Who daily conquers them anew.*”

What is this to conquer freedom and existence daily? I am persuaded that Goethe meant to urge a constant willingness, yea, an avidity to be further to-day than yesterday; to be ever ready to exchange the good of yesterday with the better of to-day. He meant that men should not be cloyed by custom and conventionalities; to see right as God gives them to see the right and to obey the law of growth unflinchingly. To conquer our freedom is to be manly, alert, wide-awake morally, intellectually, religiously, open and eager in the pursuit of truth. Truth is only attained by striving. Does the man asleep in torpor, whether religious, intellectual or moral—does he deserve the sense of freedom? Is it not a profound fact that only he, who is willing to don the armor, to conquer his freedom, is free and alive indeed? I can illustrate this dictum of Goethe's best by an appeal to history. Why have races and peoples perished? Is it not because they

kept not pace with the totality of advance, man was making? Did these perished races adjust themselves to the sounder knowledge or sounder life principles that others had acquired? Did they keep vigilant watch on the towers of their possessions? The towers were stormed and taken, and the consequence is that Assyria and Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome are no more. Was not Goethe right in saying

“Das ist der Weisheit höchster Schluss:—
Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben
Der täglich sie erobern muss?”

This, Goethe puts before us, as the law of life. He urges constant vigilance, constant effort to grow and to receive light, “more light.” Every man can advance on this line,—he can conquer inertness and seek to be alive and true. Man is “dowered with Day and Night” ’tis true, with noblest impulses and with ignoble passions, and yet he is called to advance. Goethe would have us think, as did Browning, that

“All good things

Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul.”

Human existence is not a mistake. The Almighty has not made a huge blunder in framing his worlds, has not made a huge blunder in framing our dust; nor has he failed to provide means for attaining the fullness of life.





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